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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 5 November 1991, at 3 p.m.

President:	Mr. SHIHABI	(Saudi Arabia)
later:	Mr. LEGWAILA (Vice-President)	(Botswana)

- Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations: report of the Secretary-General (continued)

- Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (continued)

- Statement by the President

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- Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations: report of the Secretary-General (continued)

- Statement by the President

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 143 (continued)

STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/46/568)

Mr. EHLERS (Uruguay) (interpretation from Spanish): At the outset I wish to express my delegation's support for the statement made by the delegation of Ghana on behalf of the Group of 77.

Today the world is experiencing constant and repeated humanitarian emergencies, and all the signs are that this situation will continue. For many years now the international community has been attempting to exercise solidarity in facing these situations. This is proved by the existence of a vast network of governmental and non-governmental organizations seeking to mitigate the devastating effects of various kinds of disasters upon the lives of hundreds of thousands of human beings.

The United Nations now proposes to find the best way to channel these various efforts, as well as those of individual States, in such a way as to use available resources as efficiently as possible and, at the same time, to coordinate them in order to ensure the effective attainment of this selfless common objective.

The events that have the most devastating effect upon the lives of human beings are natural disasters of various kinds, environmental emergencies, technological disasters and human conflicts. Although each of us can produce a long list of situations that might be regarded as humanitarian emergencies, the international community has not yet defined exactly what it is that makes an emergency situation merit the attention of the international community as a whole.

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It could be argued that such a definition is not necessary, that the obvious gravity of a tragedy is enough to generate a reaction from the international community. However, very recently, we have seen situations, both of natural and of political origins, that have received great attention while others have been almost ignored. Accordingly, it seems clear that the primary responsibility for coming to the assistance of those affected, assessing the situation and possibly calling for international action in every case falls to the States affected. It is when the capacity of States is overwhelmed by the scale of the events that the international community must raise the alert and come to the aid of those affected.

It is also clear that any parameters which may be defined will have to differentiate between disasters that are beyond human control, or, in whose genesis the human factor is not directly involved, and those caused by the will of man by war, political conflicts or conflicts involving human rights. Emergencies caused directly by man have been dealt with differently depending on the case, and it is of fundamental importance that the international community should define, by consensus, where its responsibility begins.

As the Foreign Minister of Uruguay, Dr. Gros Espiell, said during the general debate at the beginning of this session, the principle of non-intervention cannot stand as a protective barrier behind which the rights of peoples can be disregarded. The collective obligation, decided upon by legal means, to provide aid and assistance when grave emergencies arise is not incompatible with the inviolable principle of national sovereignty.

It must be stressed that this task we are undertaking will go hand in hand with new practices and new situations that will call for international

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legal instruments giving them legal foundation. This collateral activity must not be rejected.

In general, we believe that the consent of States should be the overriding criterion in order for international aid mechanisms to begin to function. Once consent has been obtained, governments should afford total cooperation with the aid organizations.

Uruguay is convinced that the best way to mitigate the effects of the various kinds of disaster is prevention, and that the best method of prevention is to promote the development process. Solutions to the problems we face are directly linked to economic development. Without sustainable and equitable development for the world as a whole, but particularly for the developing countries, many of the factors which today cause or threaten disaster will remain unchanged.

It is precisely this lack of integrated and sustainable development which generates many of the causes of the various types of emergency. Natural disasters are encouraged by inefficient practices in production, by concentrations of marginal populations in areas unable to sustain them, and by the abuse of resources, both renewable and non-renewable. Environmental disasters frequently have their origins in practices which are efficient up to a point but which do not take into account their impact on the planet's ecosystem. Technological disasters are encouraged by the desire to obtain the prosperity offered by the advancement of knowledge without taking the necessary precautions into account, and human conflicts are exacerbated by the lack of an equitable distribution of development opportunities.

As a part of that development, which we feel is indispensable, we must include a component which would consist in implementing, in every country, a

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system which would enable States to be better prepared to face any kind of emergency. This is particularly necessary in those countries which are most likely to suffer the kinds of disaster we are talking about, especially natural disasters. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) training programme is particularly valuable in this area, and should be continued and expanded.

The United Nations system already possesses a great deal of installed capacity with which to respond to large-scale emergencies. UNDRO, UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and others do have capabilities in this area which in some respects overlap and in other respects are complementary. In considering the most appropriate means to strengthen coordination between them, Member States must make clear, through their deeds, their political and financial commitment to this undertaking. It is not simply a matter of expressing our desires and creating a new international superstructure for coordination. The task in hand is one of studying and reassessing everything that has been done so far, in the conviction that if we arrive at the conclusion that there are organs that need to be changed or recombined or whose mandates need to be redefined, we shall proceed on the basis of what is necessary for the goals envisaged, not on the basis of vested interests of a political, institutional or personal nature.

The basic element in this effort, as the Secretary-General stresses in his report (A/46/568), is the undertaking by States to provide the human and material resources in the amounts required to advance the world's organized

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and disinterested international solidarity. Without that political will, any intellectual effort will not bear fruit.

In evaluating the question of financing, we must bear very much in mind what is said in document A/46/594, in which, referring to finance for development, the Secretary-General says that:

> "The new and expanded requirement for capital could affect the developing countries in a particularly acute manner since their relative position in the world economy has been deteriorating for some time". (A/46/594, p.3, para. 5)

In this document, the Secretary-General also stresses that, as a result of events in recent years in the world economy,

> "The accumulated effect has been an ex ante imbalance between savings and investment, that is, a large excess demand for capital. (ibid.)
>
> "As a result, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has estimated that the additional demand for savings might well exceed $100 billion in 1991 and thereafter. (ibid., para. 6)
>
> "The real challenge ahead is to agree on a strategy to correct the ex ante imbalance between savings and investment and thus allow all countries to carry out and attract the investment necessary to grow, improve the social well-being of their citizens and consolidate pluralistic political systems". (ibid., para. 7)

The idea of a rotating fund is a positive one, and its amount should be determined on the basis of the known costs and level of expenditure that can be forecast on the basis of experience. It would also be desirable for there to be a more efficient allocation of the resources now available. In any event, Uruguay believes that the objective of not sparing resources for

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development programmes should have priority, and we reiterate our support for the notion that an international conference on finance for development must be held.

Another aspect of great importance which must be considered is that humanitarian assistance cannot be a simple palliative for our common conscience, but should rather be an effort aimed at reducing the immediate effects of a disaster without at the same time creating new sources for future disasters or situations that may perpetuate the emergency. For that reason, the approach must encompass immediate aid for the victims and the reconstruction process, and for re-establishing the sustainable and self-sustaining development process in the society.

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A series of recommendations have emerged from the Secretary-General's report and the statements we have already heard. These can be complemented by the very important contribution of Mr. Erskine Childers and Mr. Brian Urquhart in their study published by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation and the Ford Foundation. Uruguay considers them very positive and worthy of being developed and put into practice.

The central theme in the informal consultations which preceded this debate and which has been introduced in all official and informal papers that have been circulated focuses on the idea of appointing a high-level adviser to the Secretary-General to coordinate the system's activities with respect to humanitarian assistance.

My delegation believes that this initiative is positive in principle and deserves to be considered in depth, in particular with respect to conflicts that might emerge between organizations accustomed to having their autonomy and a new central authority. In addition, if this new adviser is to preside over a permanent committee made up of various heads of agencies, he might be obliged always to seek a compromise consensus between bureaucratic interests, to the detriment of efficiency in the task of providing assistance.

In evaluating this initiative, one should take into account not only the professional duties of the coordinator but also the personal and bureaucratic hurdles he will have to overcome. The person to be appointed to coordinate humanitarian assistance must have all the necessary tools and the decision-making capacity, as well as the authority to make use of them. Otherwise, he will fail.

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Uruguay reaffirms its determination to cooperate in this altruistic task - the moral obligation of all countries of the world - with the goal of ensuring human solidarity at the international level.

AGENDA ITEM 114 (continued)

SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR THE APPORTIONMENT OF THE EXPENSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS (A/46/474/Add.3)

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Arabic): I should like to draw the Assembly's attention to document A/46/474/Add.3, which contains a letter addressed to me by the Secretary-General informing me that, since the issuance of his communications dated 17 September and 8 and 10 October 1991, the Central African Republic has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Arabic): I wish to inform the Assembly that the delegations of Chile and Iraq have requested to participate in the debate on item 143. Inasmuch as the list of speakers was closed yesterday at 12.30 p.m., may I ask the Assembly whether there is any objection to the inclusion of those two delegations in the list of speakers?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Arabic): I should like to appeal once more to Member States to inscribe their names on the list of speakers before it is closed. I should also like to announce that I shall abide by the decision to close the list of speakers in the future unless it is a situation

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of a special nature. The cooperation of representatives in this regard is essential for the smooth, orderly and timely functioning of the Assembly.

AGENDA ITEM 143 (continued)

STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/46/568)

Mr. AKSIN (Turkey): Events of the recent past have shown that providing emergency humanitarian assistance to populations in need must be dealt with as a priority issue in the United Nations In addition to the usual natural disasters, new emergency situations have come about, this time man-made. It can be said that the United Nations system has in general responded well to most of these disasters and crises.

In dealing with disasters, the United Nations has accumulated a considerable amount of experience. With its specialized agencies, it has been able to respond to the requirements of particular situations. This has been mostly in the area of natural disasters. Early warning systems have been helpful. The establishment of national disaster management offices, as envisaged in the programme of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, has been another useful step. Taking precautionary measures and making preparations in cooperation with specialized agencies is essential for coping with natural disasters.

The United Nations can have an important impact also in the area of man-made disasters. Man-made disaster situations have political or economic and developmental reasons. For example, poverty will often lead to deforestation and this in turn will force people to migrate. Industrialization can also lead to technological accidents with wide-ranging and often transboundary effects. Mitigating these kinds of disasters will no

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doubt call for a more complex kind of response. We cannot overlook the political, humanitarian, developmental and environmental aspects of these situations.

The need for strengthening and enhancing the capacity of the United Nations system to cope with natural and man-made emergencies has been discussed before. Recent developments resulting in unprecedented situations where a speedy response is essential have brought this issue up once again. A timely response becomes imperative when the lives of thousands are at stake. We have seen how pledging conferences tend to provide only inadequate sums. In this respect, we support the proposal for creating an emergency revolving fund established under the authority of the Secretary-General that may be put to use immediately. In this connection, we also agree that there is a need for strengthening the mechanisms for having relief supplies available and ready to be used at short notice. Responding to these needs is becoming more and more complex, and the compartmentalization of existing United Nations structures calls for more coordination. While we may ask for better coordination among these specialized agencies, we must not fail also to highlight the need for increasing their financial resources. It is clear that with a multitude of disasters their current budgets are not sufficient to handle the needs. However, an increase of financial resources would not suffice by itself.

The most recent emergency situations have created waves of refugees and displaced persons with their attendant human suffering as well as loss of

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life. The countries of first asylum or first contact are usually the developing countries where the already limited resources are stretched even further. We have recently seen how even industrialized countries have difficulty in responding to a large influx of refugees.

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As a result of the internal developments in Iraq last April, Turkey faced a mass exodus of hundreds of thousands of people within the space of a few days. Clearly it is impossible for any country to cope on its own with such a large influx. Turkey therefore launched an appeal for international emergency aid. During the aid operation Governments and non-governmental organizations showed that they could take fairly rapid and effective action. On the other hand, it was noted that the United Nations system was not able to act with the same rapidity.

Although tensions have eased throughout the world, it would not be wrong to assume that similar situations might arise in the future. Consequently, the Government of Turkey considers it important that procedures such as the early-warning system be developed and that sustained work in this area be carried out. Furthermore, in view of the lessons that have been learned from the drama of the Iraqi asylum-seekers, it is extremely important that we take into consideration the losses suffered by the local inhabitants of the region and the environmental devastation caused by such outflows.

Man-made and natural disasters require immediate action. The United Nations is well placed to assist Governments to deal with these situations, especially when they involve more than one country. The existing United Nations structure may be satisfactory for the purpose of dealing with certain crises, but there is a need to respond more quickly. We must strengthen the United Nations by improving coordination between existing bodies. In view of these considerations, we believe that a high-level authority for emergency humanitarian assistance - an authority acting directly under the Secretary-General - has become necessary. The tasks are now numerous, complicated and interconnected - no specialized agency can act alone. The

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high-level authority could act as a catalyst by mustering the required financial resources and helping to bring together the agencies that are competent to deal with disasters. The authority should not be saddled with excessive bureaucracy; it must have the necessary flexibility to respond quickly and decisively in situations of urgency; and it should have access to the revolving emergency fund that I mentioned earlier.

We know that the international community wants the United Nations to be able to continue to deal with disaster situations, and to do so more effectively. We hope that we shall be able soon to come to an understanding so that we may be ready to act decisively when the need arises.

Mr. SIDDIQUI (Bangladesh): Action to deal with emergencies has always been a matter of major concern to Bangladesh, as has the challenge of enhancing the capacity of the United Nations system to coordinate humanitarian assistance. Naturally, we attach great importance to General Assembly debates on this subject. Our recent experience has made us more sharply aware of the very important role the United Nations can play in this area. But recent events have also highlighted the scope for further improvement. Various means of achieving this have been suggested, and we have before us the Secretary-General's useful report on the subject. Bangladesh is not wedded to any particular rigid institutional approach to improvement of the role of the United Nations in the coordination of humanitarian relief in the wake of emergencies. We are of the view, however, that all future steps in this general direction should be taken following a thorough examination of the existing capacity of the United Nations system in the area and of the ramifications of the various proposals on the table.

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We fully share the view that coping with emergencies involves prevention, preparedness and mitigation. Wherever possible, prevention must address squarely the root causes of emergencies. Potential-disaster mitigation must aim at enhancing indigenous capacity to monitor hazards, with the ultimate objective of reducing vulnerability. In this context, the United Nations system may be able to help disaster-prone countries to develop disaster-mitigation programmes. United Nations assistance in the development of early-warning systems in disaster-prone areas and in the improvement of existing systems would also be particularly helpful.

Scarcity of funds, resulting in the impeding of emergency-relief operations, is also a key question that must be considered seriously. With regard to funding, Bangladesh is open to all constructive ideas concerning the rapid launching of United Nations humanitarian relief in response to specific crises. The requirements for funds for specific relief operations are, however, bound to vary, depending on the crisis to be tackled, its magnitude and its severity. In the case of a disaster on a scale and of a magnitude far too great to be handled alone by the United Nations, with the limited funds available to it, there should be scope for mobilising the additional resources necessary for overcoming the crisis. We feel strongly that preparedness for disaster could be improved significantly through constant review and improvisation of contingency transportation arrangements, as well as the advance location of stores of necessary materials. Here, the experience and capacity of specific United Nations bodies and organs and of disaster-stricken countries could be put fully to use. Bangladesh would be particularly happy to share its own experience in the handling of natural disasters, with a view

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to improving the response of the United Nations system in cases of emergencies.*

Bangladesh is sure that the maintenance of a register of stand-by capacity - I refer to all human and material capacity available within the United Nations framework and within States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations - for mobilization at short notice would be particularly helpful and must, therefore, be given serious consideration. In this context we strongly support the idea that the United Nations central database for emergencies should be strengthened and made comprehensive and easily accessible.

During this debate much has been said about the best way to strengthen coordination of the emergency humanitarian activities of the United Nations. Bangladesh is of the view that this matter should be approached with the utmost circumspection. To the extent that the absence of a standing inter-agency committee is impeding coordination, surely the establishment of such a committee deserves serious consideration. With regard to emergency humanitarian assistance, we feel that all institutional rearrangements should aim at achieving full utilization of the capacity already available within the United Nations system. In that context, we should like to underscore the continuing relevance and importance of the United Nations Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO) and its functions. The practice of presenting unified and consolidated appeals in cases of emergencies has proved its usefulness and should be continued.

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* Mr. Legwaila (Botswana), Vice-President, took the Chair.

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No system of coordinating United Nations emergency-relief assistance can be fully effective unless it is carefully synchronized with relief efforts at country level and with identified national needs. This can and should be secured through proper integration of United Nations relief operations with the internal relief operations mounted by national authorities. In this regard, it might be particularly helpful if a focal point for United Nations relief operations at country level - one that would constantly interact with the corresponding national focal point - were designated.

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In concluding, let me note that although structural and institutional changes are important, they alone are not a sure panacea for the shortcomings in the existing international response mechanism to disasters and emergencies. Comprehensive solutions in the area also depend to a large extent on the genuine commitment of all the key actors - the United Nations, the donor countries, the disaster-stricken countries, and other relevant organizations - to work together towards common goals. They must share a spirit of partnership and an unwavering sense of responsibility in order for their endeavours to be successful. Special efforts are also necessary to ensure that humanitarian - not political - considerations come to the fore in determining the nature and extent of the system-wide response to specific emergencies.

Finally, we must also clearly understand the relationship between the problem of emergency relief and the question of development. After all, emergencies do have an important bearing on the development of affected countries. Their level of development also has serious implications for their degree of preparedness - or inversely their degree of vulnerability. In that context, the need for international cooperation must go hand in hand with bold and comprehensive initiatives to deal with international economic questions which are essential for development.

Mr. CAMILLERI (Malta): Since its earliest days the United Nations has been deeply involved in providing emergency humanitarian relief and assistance. This is a fundamental manifestation of the human solidarity which lies at the heart of our Organization.

Three agencies with direct mandates in the broad area of relief assistance have been established over the years: the United Nations Relief

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and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in 1949, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1951 and the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) in 1971. At the same time, the Secretary-General has established the practice of appointing, on an ad hoc basis, special representatives to assist him in dealing with humanitarian cases of unusual political or other complexity. The General Assembly, for its part, has adopted many resolutions dealing with specific cases of emergency or humanitarian assistance.

Most of the specialized agencies, together with major programmes like the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have clearly spelled out in their mandates responsibility for emergency assistance in the specific areas of their competence.

Over the past four and a half decades there has hardly been a major disaster, natural or man-made, or a series of events resulting in massive dislocation of persons, both within and among nations, in which the United Nations family has not become collectively involved in one form or another.

In preparing his report to the Economic and Social Council earlier this year on refugees, displaced persons and returnees, the Secretary-General's consultant found it necessary to establish contact with 11 separate United Nations bodies, in addition to non-United Nations organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, non-governmental organizations and individual governments.

The question is therefore clearly not whether the international community possesses the necessary experience, capacity and determination to assist in

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emergencies. Rather, it is whether the experience, capacity and determination which do exist are being utilized to their best effect.

There are two aspects arising from this question. On the one hand, there is the aspect of promptness and effectiveness in tackling the immediate demands of emergencies as they arise. On the other hand, there is the aspect of how emergency action taken in response to sudden needs is related to long-term action dealing with the development process, and in some cases also with the resolution of conflicts.

The Secretary-General puts the matter succinctly in the Introduction to his report on the review of the capacity, experience and coordination arrangements in the United Nations for humanitarian assistance when he states:

> "The issue that arises is how the response can be made more coherent, timely, effective, commensurate with need and assured of cohesive leadership. Closely related is the reduction and eventual elimination of the root causes of humanitarian emergencies." (A/46/568, para. 2)

The Secretary-General's conclusion is that over the years there have been impressive cases of effective action in specific instances. However, he also points out that the overall experience is not uniform. For this reason, he outlines a number of recommendations aimed at ensuring that the international effort in emergency humanitarian assistance yields the most positive results. The proposals deal both with the aspect of coordination as well as with the aspect of resources.

The issue of coordination is highly topical in respect of most activities within the United Nations system. The family of organs, bodies and institutions dealing with sectoral issues has proliferated impressively over

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the years. This has largely been in response to needs as they arose. On occasion it has also been in response to the desire to improve effectiveness of action in areas where existing organs or bodies were somehow judged to be performing inadequately.

One reaction to this proliferation has been the concern that the multiplicity and sometimes overlapping of mandates on issues of a multisectoral or interdisciplinary nature has become a significant factor of delay and inefficiency, especially at the delivery point. These concerns are valid, though they sometimes tend to underestimate both the complexity of the tasks involved as well as the effectiveness of the existing structures taking into account the limited resources available. However, concerns about delay and inefficiency are of particular relevance in the case of humanitarian emergency assistance, where rapid and efficient delivery is a vital consideration.

One of the Secretary-General's proposals in this connection concerns the appointment of a high-level coordinator to assist him personally in exercising the leadership which is critical in mobilizing the political, humanitarian and development capacities of the United Nations system for a coherent and effective response to emergency situations. The proposed coordinator would draw upon the capacity of existing operational organizations and not duplicate capacities which already exist. The attraction of this proposal lies precisely in its concentration on the need to fill a noticeable gap in the existing set-up, namely the institutional injection of leadership and authority at both the organizational as well as the operational levels. In this light, my delegation believes that the proposal deserves serious

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consideration, taking also into account the various observations which have been made by many speakers in this regard.

One of the major concerns relating to the human, material and finanical resources required in emergencies, is that relating to their early deployment. In order to deal with this concern the Secretary-General proposes the establishment of a central emergency revolving fund of $50 million, to serve as a cash-flow mechanism for the initial phases of an operation. The replenishment of the fund together with additional funding for the subsequent phases of an operation would be provided through the launching of consolidated appeals.

The Secretary-General also makes specific proposals relating to the prepositioning of stockpiles of relief supplies and logistical support, on stand-by teams of technical specialists, and on standing arrangements with Member States for access to their emergency relief supplies.

My delegation supports the basic thrust of these proposals in that they deal with the need to ensure that at the outbreak of an emergency the question of rapid deployment of resources, rather than the problem of procurement, should constitute the first focus of attention.

Closely linked to this point is the need for early-warning systems and preventive mechanisms. In this connection also, the Secretary-General's report contains a number of useful recommendations.

The value of preventive and mitigation measures was dramatically highlighted in the recent Pinatubo volcano in the Philippines where 500 lives were lost. But we are told, under more unfortunate circumstances, tens of thousands of persons could have been killed. This saving of lives has been mainly ascribed to the use of adequate technology for monitoring the volcano,

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together with a warning and communication system which allowed the timely evacuation of the population under immediate threat.

In the light of this and similar experiences, the Secretary-General's advice should not go unheeded that:

> "More systematic arrangements should be put in place by the United Nations to draw upon the early-warning capacities of Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations." (ibid., para. 9)

In this connection, the special needs of developing countries should be given particular attention.

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A sensitive issue directly related to early and effective measures in dealing with emergencies is that of access. The Secretary-General finds it necessary to underline the obvious by stating that access to emergency areas is an indispensable condition for relief and humanitarian work. This issue is sometimes seen as contradicting the obligation of non-interference in the internal affairs of States as laid down in the Charter of the United Nations, especially in cases of internal conflicts.

It is more fruitful, however, to approach this problem in the pragmatic manner suggested in the Secretary-General's report, namely, in terms of the negotiation of ground rules with respect to timing and modality of access and continuous discussions with all parties concerning cross-border or cross-line assessment of needs, delivery of assistance, and international monitoring.

In the final analysis, the need for emergency humanitarian assistance by the international community as a whole arises because of situations in which a sequence of events, be they economic, social, political or natural, overwhelms a single State's capacity to safeguard the basic fundamental rights and interests of its citizens - situations which can arise in any State, but to which the developing countries, in particular the smallest and weakest among them, are especially vulnerable.

It is not useful to analyse such situations in terms of the possible contradiction between the international community's commitment to assist the individuals in distress and the concept of State sovereignty. Rather, the essential issue should be seen in the gap between the desire and responsibilities of States to safeguard and protect the rights and interests of their citizens and the limited experience and resources they may have

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available for this purpose. A State that cynically and deliberately uses the international readiness to offer humanitarian relief to all or part of its population, in cases of manifest need, as a pawn in a political or military conflict puts itself outside the bounds of acceptable international norms, of which the concept of State sovereignty is an important, but not exclusive, element.

The upheavals that have recently been taking place in various parts of Europe, and currently in Yugoslavia, have highlighted the issue of emergency humanitarian relief in a new and unexpected context. During the past summer, Malta became directly involved in one of these upheavals when large numbers of Albanian citizens suddenly travelled to neighbouring countries, including Malta, in an attempt to escape from massive unemployment and want.

In the light of this experience, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta wrote to the Secretary-General on 13 August about the heart-wrenching scene of some 700 of these refugees, among them several young children between 6 and 16 years of age, suffering the distress of the ordeal their country was passing through. My Minister expressed his concern that events there and elsewhere might lead to a state of affairs in which the democratic process would lose its meaning and not survive a collapse of the economy, massive unemployment and resulting hunger.

In response to the concerns expressed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta, the High Commissioner for Refugees agreed, underlining the essential link between democracy, observance of fundamental freedoms and economic and social development. With Albania's economy virtually paralysed and its population, especially its youth, in a state of despair, it is not only the

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democratization process in Albania that is at risk, but also the stability of the surrounding region.

The linkage between emergency assistance and the economic, social and even political aspects of the affected country's development, clearly brought out in this exchange, has been emphasized by the many speakers who have already taken part in this debate. Developing countries rightly insist that many emergencies and even conflicts are the direct product of underdevelopment. It is therefore important, in the context of the discussion we are undertaking here, that means for emergency assistance not only are conceived as instinctive actions aimed at alleviating tragic situations, but also take fully into account the requirements of the affected countries' medium- and long-term processes of developments.

Mr. HALLAK (Syrian Arab Republic) (interpretation from Arabic): At the outset, I should like to extend thanks to the Secretary-General for his report on humanitarian assistance and natural disasters (A/46/568). It was a valuable contribution to the debate that took place over the past week in the Second Committee.

I will not dwell in my statement today on the devastating aftermath of natural disasters and their effect on the economies of the developing countries in particular and the lives they claim in different countries of the world. So many other delegations have talked about all this. The Secretary-General's report and statements made by a number of United Nations officials detailed information that highlight the interest of the international community in the issue of disasters and the search for the most effective means of mitigating their effects and helping their victims. My country has welcomed the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction,

(Mr. Hallak, Syrian Arab Republic)

proclaimed by the General Assembly at the beginning of the 1990s. We will cooperate with Member States and with the various agencies of the United Nations in order to achieve the objectives of the Decade. The declaration of that Decade testifies to the determination of the international community to face up to natural disasters that befall both affluent and poor countries alike although developing countries are the hardest hit because they are much more vulnerable in the face of such disasters. The declaration of the Decade also testifies to a spirit of international solidarity and cooperation that should be commended.

As to humanitarian assistance provided to the victims of disasters, the Syrian Arab Republic, which is one of the developing countries, has provided assistance, within its means, to a number of countries that have suffered earthquakes, floods or other natural disasters. At the start of the Gulf crisis, my Government fully cooperated with the United Nations to make plans to receive displaced persons and return them to their countries of origin: we opened our borders to all displaced persons and set up centres on all our borders and around the capital to receive them and to facilitate their return to their countries of origin. We also put at the disposal of the United Nations significant facilities in the areas of transport, special exchange rates and the flow of relief material to the affected neighbouring countries. In addition, we have borne a certain amount of expense in receiving the displaced persons during their stay in our country. Syria also suffered loss because of the return of several thousand Syrians who had been working in Kuwait.

Cooperation during the Gulf crisis was excellent between the High Commission established by my Government of the representatives of a number of

(Mr. Hallak, Syrian Arab Republic)

our ministries and the international group that represented several agencies of the United Nations under the chairmanship of the United Nations Coordinator, who represents the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO).

(Mr. Hallak, Syrian Arab Republic)

The efforts of those agencies deserve appreciation. My delegation concurs with the Secretary-General's reference in his report to the insufficiency of United Nations resources and to the necessity of making available sufficient moneys as the main condition to be fulfilled in order for the Organization to assume an effective leading role in this respect.

Supporting the role of the United Nations in accordance with its Charter and its resolutions is the constant approach of the Syrian Arab Republic. In keeping with this approach, we call for a role for the United Nations and its Secretary-General in providing humanitarian assistance and combating disasters. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General in which he indicated his intention to provide both financial and human resources for existing relief machinery. We believe that the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), established by General Assembly resolution 2816 in 1971 to coordinate our Organization's efforts in the fields of humanitarian assistance and aid to developing countries in combating disasters and mitigating their effects, is able to assume this task if given the necessary financial and other resources, and if reinforced in a way consistent with the many resolutions of the General Assembly, the latest of which is 45/221.

Mr. FERNANDEZ De COSSIO DOMINGUEZ (Cuba) (interpretation from Spanish): My delegation, as a member of the Group of 77, fully subscribes to the statement made by our Chairman, the delegation of Ghana. Similarly, we base our positions on the political points put forth in the statement of the Foreign Ministers of the Group of 77 on 30 September last. Our statement will be limited to emphasizing some additional points. These include both firm

(Mr. Fernandez De Cossio Dominguez, Cuba)

political positions and questions concerning points made here as to the existing capacities of the United Nations system for coordinating prompt and effective responses to emergencies requiring humanitarian aid.

There is no doubt as to the usefulness of improving coordination of United Nations efforts in the provision of emergency relief, just as there has never been any doubt for some time now, at least in our minds, about the need to achieve an effective United Nations mechanism for coordinating international cooperation in economic and social development in such a way as to gain the respect and support of all Member States, particularly the developed countries.

It has proven impossible to achieve a degree of international cooperation entailing harmony between the political decisions adopted in the United Nations and those formulated by the system's various agencies, especially those organs or mechanisms that are directly linked to international economic relations, such as the Bretton Woods institutions and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). If such coordination had been achieved, many of the problems that today beset developing countries would have been addressed more effectively, and the system's capacity to respond to the indefeasible aspiration to economic and social development would have crystallized differently.

Something leads us to believe in the possibility of such cooperation where humanitarian emergency relief is concerned: perhaps an improvement of the system in that respect or an increased will to respond to what is becoming an emergency, more than what constitutes a structural problem - despite the propensity of structural problems to become emergencies.

(Mr. Fernandez De Cossio Dominguez, Cuba)

In any event, the endeavour is a praiseworthy one, and Cuba welcomes the obvious concern for ensuring that emergency humanitarian problems are given priority through concerted action aimed at orchestrating the various agencies that directly or indirectly play a role in providing emergency assistance according to their respective mandates.

Of course, this objective requires us to establish very clearly what we mean when we speak of emergency humanitarian relief. Cuba joins with other nations in proclaiming our rejection of any attempt to include or encompass within this term the current thinking aimed at upholding the "right to intervene" in matters falling within the internal jurisdiction of States, or of the idea of adding to the list of emergencies recognized by the United Nations other emergencies of a political nature, opening the way to arbitrary and unilateral interventionist interpretations. Cuba reiterates that respect for the sovereignty of States is absolute; the United Nations has been built on the basis of that principle, and it is unacceptable to seek to give the Organization functions for which the Charter does not provide and which are contrary to its raison d'être.

We vigorously oppose any new version, and especially any widespread practice, of the so-called doctrine of limited sovereignty, a danger that may be glimpsed in notions such as the right of interference or in the interpretation that some seek to give to humanitarian assistance, to which are added deliberately confusing reassessments of the concept of sovereignty arising within processes of integration, in an attempt to provide endorsement for intervention in the internal affairs of States.

(Mr. Fernandez De Cossio Dominguez, Cuba)

My delegation also stresses the principle recognized in resolutions and decisions of the United Nations concerning the role that falls to the State concerned in initiating and developing emergency relief programmes within its own territory. Any assistance must be provided under the consent of the party requesting it and in the context of its needs and priorities.

The Secretary-General's report makes recommendations concerning the prevention of disasters and emergency situations. However, reference is made only to natural disasters, which are to a great extent inevitable. There is no reference under that heading to many other disasters or emergency situations that are discussed in other parts of the report, and whose causes are known; such disasters are virtually ignored in this context. We wonder what it could be, if not underdevelopment, that is the root cause of many of the great currents of migration and of refugees that become emergencies. What can it be, if not underdevelopment, that is the essential cause of the hunger afflicting many parts of the world? What but underdevelopment is the basic cause of the epidemics that strike vast populations in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and of the resurgence of old epidemics in the western hemisphere after almost a century? What, if not underdevelopment, is the fundamental cause behind developing countries' particular vulnerability to the impact of natural disasters, and their limited effectiveness in mitigating the results and providing assistance to their citizens?

(Mr. Fernandez de Cossio Dominguez, Cuba)

We find it difficult to understand how the struggle against underdevelopment can be omitted from the list of possibilities for preventing humanitarian emergency situations. We also find it difficult to understand what type of mechanism or coordination at the highest level of the United Nations will be able to produce solutions that have been hampered for years by a lack of political will. We doubt that the answer lies in the naming of one more high-level official in the Secretariat.

On the other hand, we support efforts to achieve more efficient coordination leading to prompt, efficient responses to requests for assistance. We consider this to be viable through a coordinating entity, not under a supervisory authority that oversteps the existing mandates of the various organs and agencies in their emergency humanitarian assistance activities.

Mr. ACHARYA (Nepal): The representative of Ghana has made a statement on this agenda item on behalf of the Group of 77. I shall therefore limit myself to a few remarks.

Experience has shown that in cases of humanitarian emergency, whether natural or man-made, the developing countries are more vulnerable than the developed ones. My delegation therefore appreciates the point made by the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands, speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, that sustainable development and a developed infrastructure enable a country to cope better with the impact of disaster. We fully support his emphasis on developmental issues and on the solution of political problems.

(Mr. Acharya, Nepal)

The United Nations, its family of agencies, many donor countries and non-governmental organizations have been rendering invaluable assistance, often in the most trying circumstances, to save human lives and to mitigate suffering. The need to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations system to cope effectively with emergencies has had the attention of the Assembly for many years now. The Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator has acquired valuable experience in this regard over the years, and the Economic and Social Council has carried out very useful exercises under the able leadership of its Vice-President, Ambassador Jan Eliasson of Sweden. The swiftness with which a humanitarian relief operation is mounted is often crucial to its success. Often, assistance delayed is assistance wasted. The initiative of the European Community in inscribing this item on the agenda of the General Assembly, therefore, deserves our appreciation.

The United Nations, by its very nature, has to play a central role in emergency humanitarian assistance. The improved climate of international relations has added to the expectations of a swift and effective United Nations response. Various General Assembly resolutions, especially 36/225 and 37/144, have focused on coordinating emergency humanitarian assistance. Besides the obvious need for inter-agency coordination, the task of coordinating efforts at governmental and non-governmental levels is best left to the United Nations. There is also a need to ensure a balance between humanitarian operations and political considerations.

Many delegations, especially those of the Nordic countries and members of the European Community, have put forward serious recommendations to strengthen United Nations humanitarian emergency assistance. I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/46/568), which contains several concrete

(Mr. Acharya, Nepal)

recommendations. His proposal for the establishment of a revolving fund deserves serious attention. In this context, I wish to underline my delegation's belief that such a fund should be viewed as a means of responding promptly to an emergency situation and not as a substitute for voluntary contributions.

Another proposal meriting serious consideration is the establishment of an inter-agency standing committee for coordination. The overall goal of this proposal is operational effectiveness. The proposal for the appointment of a high-level coordinator directly responsible to the Secretary-General has obviously been made with similar considerations in mind. My delegation shares the view that such restructuring should be carried out within the overall context of the revitalization of the United Nations system.

This debate has offered a welcome opportunity to carry further the ongoing exchange of views on strengthening the coordination of United Nations humanitarian emergency assistance. We hope that the ideas and recommendations presented here will be merged into concrete proposals to strengthen further the role of the United Nations in all related aspects of humanitarian emergencies - prevention, preparedness, swift relief and recovery.

Mr. HOLGER (Chile) (interpretation from Spanish): My delegation could not but participate in the debate on the item before the Assembly today and present some comments on the need to strengthen the coordination of United Nations emergency humanitarian assistance, an objective on which there would appear to be a consensus, judging by the statements of those who have spoken before me.

This item has special meaning for my country, which has been struck repeatedly by natural disasters of great impact. In the past Chile has had to

(Mr. Holger, Chile)

overcome the consequences of these disasters by its own means and with the generous international solidarity of friendly countries and organs of the United Nations. Our experience demonstrates that this debate should remain in a strictly humanitarian context.

We are pleased by the European Community's timely initiative in requesting the inclusion of this matter in our agenda. We also congratulate the Secretary-General on the outstanding report he has submitted and on his wise proposals and recommendations, which we have analysed in detail and which complement work previously done by Ambassador Eliasson, Permanent Representative of Sweden and Chairman of the Economic and Social Council's Coordinating Committee.

The Permanent Representative of Brazil eloquently brought out the scope and importance of the work our Organization is doing in the field of humanitarian assistance when he said,

> "From an ethical standpoint, what activities could be more commendable and more unobjectionable than those intended to provide relief and care for those in need (...)?" (A/46/PV.39, p. 46)

(Mr. Holger, Chile)

Great progress has been made in coping effectively with natural disasters and in providing emergency humanitarian relief. There is no doubt that our Organization has played a key part in this work and through it many agencies have participated in work related to this task. None the less, in the light of my country's experience, I believe that it might be helpful to touch on some matters that should be borne in mind in the effort to make humanitarian aid programmes more effective.

Naturally, there is the consideration of coordination, a recurrent theme in the interventions of all previous speakers. This should become the central focus of attention in the humanitarian assistance system, so as to maximize the effect of efforts made to assist the victims of disasters. Experience indicates that, in the absence of fast and effective channels of communication and information between donor agencies and receiving bodies coping with natural disasters, humanitarian relief has not always arrived on time or corresponded to the specific needs of the affected population.

We believe that there is interest in the idea of the Secretary-General to appoint a high official responsible for coordinating at the highest level the capacity of the United Nations for providing emergency humanitarian relief, so long as it effectively covers existing needs as set forth in paragraph 32 of the report of the Secretary-General.

Another equally interesting initiative of the Secretary-General is that of establishing a revolving fund for emergency situations with an initial amount of $50 million. Both initiatives should be the subject of informal consultations among Member States.

For the immediate future we fully support the Secretary-General's useful suggestions with regard to strengthening early warning systems and prevention

(Mr. Holger, Chile)

and preparedness measures for emergency humanitarian relief. The institutionalization of such machninery by those organs of the system that are committed to disaster situations could considerably mitigate the impact of unwelcome natural phenomena.

In supporting intiatives aimed at institutionalizing the machinery involved in humanitarian relief, we do not seek to turn it into a monopoly. In reality humanitarian relief work is a common responsibility, and the way the tasks involved are carried out will depend on the moral and ethical values of each State.

Moreover, I wish to recall the basic principles governing Chile's view of the concept of humanitarian aid as enshrined in its legal structures and established international rules. We believe that all emergency situations must be declared by the States themselves. There are no absolute definitions enabling us to establish a priori the nature, magnitude or impact of a major natural disaster calling for an international relief programme. International solidarity can come into play only when the Government of an affected country has requested or accepted it. Similarly, we support the idea that the request or acceptance of donations should normally come about through the usual official channels, without prejudice to individual humanitarian circumstances which might make it desirable to use other channels in certain special circumstances.

It is also important to recall that it is up to the Government of the country affected to define the type of assistance required. In this connection, particular value is to be attached to the recommendations on early warning contained in the Secretary-General's report because this will enable

(Mr. Holger, Chile)

donor agencies to know in advance the characteristics and types of assistance that are of most help to States in the commoner types of disasters.

The interesting debate we have had on an item of the greatest international importance, which has had the active participation of many delegations, is an eloquent expression of the renewed sense of solidarity that may be seen among the peoples of the present-day world. It will be up to this Organization once more to capitalize on those efforts and to extend them to new projects and initiatives aimed at alleviating the human misfortune suffered in situations in which the uncontrollable forces of nature are unleashed.

Mr. MOHAMMED (Iraq) (interpretation from Arabic): There is no doubt that the promotion of the United Nations ability to provide humanitarian assistance in cases of emergency is in keeping with one of the main objectives of the United Nations Organization, its Charter and its humanitarian principles. In this context, our delegation cannot disagree with opinions or proposals that would help improve such capacities within the United Nations Organization. For that reason, my delegation believes that development of the debate and dialogue and attainment of the point where proposals are implemented through a comprehensive consensus resolution, is one of the objectives which we must achieve in the near future.

Before providing the details of my country's position on some of the issues raised within this item, I would first like to express our support for the statement made by the representative of Ghana this morning on behalf of the Group of Seventy-Seven. We believe that the issue requires further fruitful discussion and dialogue. However, one of the principles that my delegation wishes to reaffirm is that humanitarian assistance must not be an

(Mr. Mohammed, Iraq)

element of intervention in the internal affairs of States. Were it to be so, it would be in clear contravention of the Charter as well as of international law. This would negate an important facet of the humanitarian nature of such assistance. Assistance and the means of providing it must therefore respect the sovereignty of States and peoples. Otherwise, the result would also be to infringe the Charter and its principles, as well as to create contradictions leading to further complications and tragedies instead of treating the humanitarian problem itself.

Humanitarian assistance cannot be imposed by the donors or by any State. The beneficiary must a priori agree to accept such assistance. Otherwise, it would be a case of coercion, which is incompatible with the humanitarian concept of aid.

(Mr. Mohammed, Iraq)

Without its humanitarian component, assistance would become something else. Indeed, it would become a form of intervention for political purposes in direct contradiction to the Charter. The imposition of assistance has been used in some cases, and in the case of Iraq, coercion and military intervention have been used as well as the use of force, the breach of sovereignty and of territorial integrity. In this context, this issue was raised by the representative of India this morning when he cited resolution 45/100 which reaffirms the sovereignty of States and their territorial integrity.

Our experience in Iraq, which has been raised by many delegations, as well as the conclusions reached in United Nations reports, including the report of Mr. Ahtisaari and the mission of Prince Aga Khan, as well as reports of many non-governmental and humanitarian organizations, all reaffirm one essential point: that the principal reason for the suffering of the Iraqi people was first, a result primarily of the brutal aggression perpetrated against Iraq under the leaderhip of the United States - aggression which led to the destruction of Iraq's economic infrastructure as well as services and civilian institutions. Secondly, it was also a result of the barbaric economic, inhuman embargo which still continues with all the well-known tragic consequences. Thirdly, it was a result of foreign intervention in Iraqi internal affairs, the incitement of problems and the encouragement of internal conflicts both ethnic and between communities.

For that reason, we say that the elimination of these reasons - lifting the embargo, non-intervention in the internal affairs of Iraq - are the only means that would put an end to the suffering of the Iraqi people, particularly

(Mr. Mohammed, Iraq)

since Iraq is committed to implementing all Security Council resolutions. The circumstances which were used as a pretext to impose the embargo against Iraq no longer exist. Therefore, the embargo must be lifted. The boycott must be ended so that the Iraqi people may reconstruct the country, may resume its normal life and enjoy its natural resources. Without that, the exploitation of humanitarian assistance for political purposes will remain a breach of the principles of the Charter and international law in a manner that is clearly in contradiction with the points raised by most delegations in the course of this debate.

Iraq, with all its natural wealth, can certainly meet the needs for a free, dignified life for its people and therefore continuing the boycott because of a position taken by the United States and some of its allies, prevents Iraq from undertaking what it wishes to undertake - namely, to participate in providing donations and assistance in emergencies and other cases which require such assistance within the context of the United Nations or outside it. Iraq's record is well-known in this field.

In addition, the requirements of the operations of United Nations specialized agencies in cases of assistance to Iraq can also be used by the United Nations in other places which may require them. Therefore, the lifting of the boycott imposed on Iraq is a long overdue legal, humanitarian and ethical step. The continuation of the boycott is a clear contravention of Security Council resolutions on the subject. It is an act of aggression against Iraq and its people.

My delegation also believes that the nature of humanitarian assistance must have a comprehensive humanitarian viewpoint aimed at putting an end to

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underdevelopment and poverty in developing countries. This is an essential point that must be reaffirmed. Failure to respond to the requirements of international economic cooperation renders insufficient some forms of assistance which are provided as humanitarian aid. That assistance deals with emergency situations which have only occurred as a result of the imbalance in international economic relations. Furthermore, such assistance is often used for other political objectives.

My delegation, therefore, supports all efforts to deal with humanitarian assistance through an objective and comprehensive point of view which must put an end to poverty and its root causes. We would suggest a long-term study of the problem instead of short-term solutions which are mere responses to emergency situations. This, of course, is related to the need to deal with the question of international economic cooperation and to increasing the effectiveness of the United Nations so as to improve the development capabilities of developing countries and enable them to cope with emergency situations in their territories, particularly in the first stages of such situations where much damage and loss of life occur.

The PRESIDENT: In accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly at its 39th plenary meeting, I now call on the Observer of Switzerland.

Mr. RAEDERSDORF (Switzerland) (interpretation from French): Over the past several years, emergency humanitarian situations have increased frighteningly, not only in scope and number but also in complexity. When a crisis occurs, the first hours and days are often decisive in saving human life or in limiting, to the extent possible, irreversible destruction. That is why Switzerland is following with great interest the reform efforts undertaken by the United Nations with a view to strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance among all interested organizations. In this regard, I should like to thank the Secretary-General for his report, which is a very significant contribution to this discussion. I should also like to thank the European Communities and the Nordic countries for their very interesting suggestions on this issue. The discussions in this debate in the plenary Assembly as well as in the Ad Hoc Working Group must be viewed in the context of the debate held last summer in the Economic and Social Council, so ably chaired by Ambassador Eliasson. From the numerous statements delivered yesterday and today I draw the conclusion that many States are in favour of improving the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance. We shall have to make sure that a country that is the victim of a catastrophe is not faced with a structure that cannot provide sufficient humanitarian assistance, as has unfortunately happened many times in the past.

That is why Switzerland supports the proposal advanced on various occasions to establish a post of United Nations coordinator for humanitarian emergency assistance, who would have direct access to the Secretary-General. His or her mandate will have to be drafted so as to enable the system to react to a crisis better and more quickly. In defining the role and the competence

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of such a coordinator, we must bear in mind the tasks of the agencies and their operational capabilities and must avoid any overlapping of activities.

The coordinator will not be able to shoulder his or her responsibilities without sufficient and immediately available resources. That is why Switzerland supports the idea of establishing a central revolving emergency fund, endowed from the outset with sufficient resources, and that is why we intend to contribute to its establishment.

The coordinator would also require adequate logistical means. Hence, Switzerland welcomes the proposal to establish an emergency standing inter-agency committee as well as an emergency group chaired by the coordinator. The General Assembly will have to decide on the organizational details.

Established in 1971 and given the principal responsibility of coordinating humanitarian emergency assistance, the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) will have to play an important role at the centre of these new structures. Over recent years it has accumulated an impressive amount of experience, which will be extremely useful in the new phase of United Nations humanitarian emergency assistance.

Nevertheless, all reorganizational efforts will have to take into account the sovereignty of States which have been the victims of catastrophes and to which the humanitarian emergency assistance will be directed. We must, however, ensure that respect for sovereignty does not undermine the speed and effectiveness of the intervention - the main role of the coordinator.

The various statements made during this debate have rather clearly shown two trends. On the one hand, the coordinator will be required, for political

(Mr. Raedersdorf, Switzerland)

and security reasons, to have direct access to the Secretary-General in New York. On the other hand, several speakers have recognized the important role that Geneva plays as the humanitarian centre of the United Nations system and of other organizations, for example the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The new organizational structure will have to take into account the specific role that the International Committee of the Red Cross plays as a partner of the United Nations. The ICRC, under its mandate, often has access to target groups to which the humanitarian organizations of the United Nations do not have access. The ICRC must be able to continue to exercise its protective functions in full independence.

During the transitional phase and until the final appointment of a coordinator, Switzerland will be ready, when there is a humanitarian emergency, speedily to place at UNDRO's disposal additional logistical and personnel support for coordination at the Geneva Centre and in the field.

Once the financial and logistical structures have been put in place on the lines we have suggested, the United Nations should seize the opportunity to improve humanitarian emergency assistance, particularly in the fields of early warning and prevention as well as preparedness, stand-by capacity and other important domains.

Switzerland sincerely hopes that during the coming days or weeks the General Assembly will be in a position to adopt, as a first important step, a resolution on strengthening coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance.

(Mr. Raedersdorf, Switzerland)

Finally, Switzerland is ready to make a concrete, albeit modest, contribution to the preparation and elaboration of the new structures to be established, by organizing a meeting to do the work necessary for the implementation of the resolution the General Assembly might soon adopt.

The PRESIDENT: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 45/6, of 16 October 1990, I now call on the Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. FALLET (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) (interpretation from French): Despite the recent settlement of a number of regional conflicts, alarming outbreaks of violence associated with the resurgence of nationalism and with the poverty that still afflicts too many peoples are still occurring.

In recent years the ICRC has thus been increasingly compelled to offer its services to States and other parties to conflicts, and has substantially increased its operational commitment in the field.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, whose task it is to ease the suffering of war, welcomes the increased importance attached by the international community to humanitarian problems. Given the great needs and the limited resources, better coordination is indeed required: it is required first of all for the victims, whose basic needs must be met irrespective of their political affiliation; it is required for the receiving States, which must be able to take emergency assistance into account in the context of longer-term planning; it is required for the donors, who are concerned to avoid costly duplication; and, lastly, it is required for the humanitarian organizations, which must be able to carry out their mandates without counter-productive competition.

(Mr. Fallet, ICRC)

The ICRC is grateful for the opportunity today to make a contribution to the debate that is under way, and is extremely keen to see a strengthening of humanitarian coordination which respects the role and specific mandate of each organization.

Allow me to recall briefly the nature of the role and mandates conferred upon the ICRC by the international community in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977, and in the statutes of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent; that role and those mandates were recently confirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution 45/6, entitled "Observer status for the International Committee of the Red Cross, in consideration of the special role and mandates conferred upon it by the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949".

The mandates require the ICRC to act as a neutral intermediary in providing protection and assistance to victims of armed conflicts and their direct consequences, and, in particular, to work for the protection and the improvement of the treatment and conditions of detention of prisoners of war, civilian internees and persons detained for security reasons; to protect civilian populations and assist in particular those who are displaced and not easily reachable because of security risks resulting from armed confrontations; to help in caring for the wounded and their evacuation; and to search for missing persons and re-establish family links, particularly through the transmission of messages and the reuniting of relatives separated by hostilities.

In situations of tension or strife not covered by international humanitarian law, the ICRC may offer its services for the performance of the same tasks on the basis of the right of initiative conferred on it under the

(Mr. Fallet, ICRC)

statutes of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement adopted by the international conferences in which the 166 States parties to the Geneva Conventions participate.

The ICRC, which is called upon to intervene in contexts which are by definition difficult, indeed hostile or dangerous, and in which humanitarian and political problems are intermingled, acts in accordance with the principles of neutrality and impartiality. It is this institutional autonomy in decision-making and financial terms which allows the ICRC to retain the flexibility required to enable it to respond to extreme emergencies. By not taking positions on the causes of conflicts, its offers of services can in certain cases be more readily accepted by all the parties, thus permitting it to gain speedy access to the victims.

The activities of the ICRC in Cambodia between 1979 and 1981, in the territories occupied by Israel, during the Gulf war, in the internal crisis in Iraq and in many other situations of civil war in Africa and Latin America have recently demonstrated the need for the ICRC to maintain this independence and neutrality.

Far from being a synonym for isolation, this concern for the independence of the ICRC forms part of a dynamic process already under way and based on transparency, complementarity and cooperation. In the large-scale assistance operations undertaken over the past 15 years, including in Thailand, Ethiopia and the Sudan, a concern for efficiency has led the ICRC to participate in, and indeed often to initiate, essential mechanisms for consultation. Apart from the very specific cooperation already established in a number of operations, including with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and many non-governmental organizations, the ICRC would also like to stress the importance of its general cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP), for the supply and delivery of relief, with the World Health Organization (WHO), in training medical personnel in situations of armed conflict, and with the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, for courses, in the context of regional seminars, on international humanitarian law.

In this spirit of pluralistic harmonization, while still retaining its independence, the ICRC is ready, as it was in the past, for example, in Cambodia, Ethiopia and the Sudan, to cooperate with whomever is responsible for coordinating United Nations emergency assistance. In armed conflict situations, the ICRC and the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which is competent to act in natural disaster situations, wish to be associated as observers with the work of the standing inter-agency emergency committee proposed in the report of the Secretary-General. Also, with a view to maintaining its independence and its capacity for rapid response in the very first moments following the outbreak of conflict, the ICRC emphasises the need to be able to continue addressing its own financial appeals to Governments and national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies while keeping the office of the United Nations coordinator fully informed. For the same reasons, the ICRC does not intend to participate in the central emergency revolving fund.

It is, however, ready, as it has often been, to have the amounts of its appeals included in the consolidated United Nations appeals. Similarly, the ICRC, while participating in donors' meetings, will continue to submit its

(Mr. Fallet, ICRC)

reports directly to the Governments concerned, which does not preclude the inclusion of ICRC data in United Nations reports.

The question of early warning systems is of great interest, and the ICRC is ready, within the limits of its resources and the confines of its mandate, to contribute here too to improving international humanitarian cooperation: the ICRC currently has 52 delegations in the field, covering some 90 situations of conflict and internal strife, and maintains ongoing relations not only with the States parties to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, but also with the other parties to conflicts and the victims of those conflicts. The ICRC is fully prepared to share all non-confidential information on its ongoing and foreseeable activities, and to participate in any meeting designed to institute such a system of exchange of information between organizations and with donor and recipient Governments.

Beyond the necessary coordination of functions, the development of harmonized approaches seems to us to be of great importance. In the context of conflicts, particularly internal ones, in which assistance is politicized by parties which use famine as a weapon to control their populations, the principle of impartiality is of fundamental importance. Impartiality makes no distinction of nationality, race, religion, social status or political affiliation. On the basis of this principle, the ICRC endeavours to assist individuals solely in respect of their sufferings, and to alleviate, as a matter of priority, the most urgent forms of distress. For there to be an adequate response to emergencies in conflict situations, there must be respect for international humanitarian law.

(Mr. Fallet, ICRC)

In terms of the existing right to assistance, a right which is often not known, ignored or misinterpreted, humanitarian assistance cannot be regarded as interference. Far from infringing upon the sovereignty of States, humanitarian assistance in armed conflicts, as provided for by international law, is, rather, an expression of that sovereignty. While States have an obligation to facilitate assistance when the urgency of the needs make assistance necessary, including in cases of internal strife, the task of the humanitarian organizations is to guarantee the impartial nature of that assistance.

(Mr. Pallet, ICRC)

There can be no doubt that relief activities, when conducted in conformity with the rules of international humanitarian law, cannot be termed interference. Moreover, relief activities are supposed to benefit from the active cooperation of the States Parties to the Geneva Conventions which have undertaken to respect this body of laws and ensure respect for it, given that clandestine activities can never be as effective as those which have received the consent of all parties involved in the conflict.

In situations of armed conflict, it is not possible to consider assistance separately from protection. If the efforts of the ICRC and other institutions have succeeded in preventing enemy attacks on a refugee camp, but the refugees in question then die as a result of an epidemic, protection is meaningless. Conversely, what would be the point of establishing a sanitation infrastructure in a camp constantly under attack?

The ICRC believes that the organizations which have been assigned the dual mandate of protecting and assisting the victims of armed conflict must be able to count on the full support not only of the community of States, but also of relief organizations in order to be able to assume this dual responsibility. Too often, indeed, emotion, a certain competitive spirit and haste have enabled political leaders to accept assistance while evading the question of protection.

Certainly, the victims need first of all to survive, and hence to receive food and medical care. Over time, however, they must also maintain their dignity, enjoy the recognized freedoms of every human being and retain hope for the future.

The ICRC also considers it essential to ensure a smooth transition from the emergency phase to the rehabilitation, reconstruction and development

(Mr. Pallet, ICRC)

phase. Arranging such a transition makes it possible, on the one hand, to reduce dependence in preparation for the handing over of responsibility and, on the other, to limit the duration of the assistance activities conducted by agencies working on an emergency basis, such as the ICRC.

It is encouraging to note that this development of harmonized approaches is already under way. We wish in particular to stress that the principles of neutrality and impartiality, as well as that of the purely humanitarian nature of assistance, are reflected in the report on the First Consultative Meeting of Senior Officials on the Crisis Situation in Southern Africa, held in Harare on 12 and 13 November 1990.

In its resolutions 45/100 on "Humanitarian assistance to victims of natural disasters and similar emergency situations" and 45/226 on "Operation Lifeline Sudan", the General Assembly made reference to these principles, thus underlining their importance.

The humanitarian aspect is often rightly emphasized in the extreme emergency phase, arousing a public opinion response and giving rise to gestures of private and public generosity which we welcome. However, they should not make us forget the political responsibilities.

Humanitarian aid deals only with the acute symptoms of crises. While ensuring that it has the resources required for operational effectiveness in the field and while facilitating its provision through the necessary authorizations, States cannot rely exclusively on emergency humanitarian action. A global approach to the problems at the level of their causes is essential, and this falls within the competence of Governments.

(Mr. Pallet, ICRC)

Humanitarian commitment certainly facilitates, but can never in the end replace, negotiation and the necessary dialogue at the political, military and economic levels.

This negotiation and this dialogue cannot be instituted and cannot achieve lasting results unless a minimum standard of humanity is respected during the conflicts, for leaving humanitarian questions unanswered leads to the degradation of conflicts. The violation of international humanitarian law exacerbates and protracts them.

Bringing the parties together in search of solutions to humanitarian problems triggers a dynamic movement capable of accelerating a peace process. The very nature of international humanitarian law combats the dangerous illusion of unlimited force, creates zones of peace at the very heart of conflicts, imposes the principle of common humanity and calls for dialogue that recognizes the enemy as a fellow human being.

If we are to make humanitarian action a true stepping-stone to peace initiatives, it is essential that the legal references given to parties in armed conflicts are clear, simple and univocal. The ICRC accordingly hopes that the community of States will take the opportunity of this debate, and of the debate to be held within a few weeks at Budapest, where the International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, will meet, to reaffirm its support for international humanitarian law and the vital need to disseminate it, as well as its political will to apply it and to ensure its application.

In conclusion, I should like to take this opportunity to thank, on behalf of the ICRC, all the Governments, organizations of the United Nations system, national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and the League, as well as the

(Mr. Fallet, ICRC)

non-governmental organizations providing support for the ICRC in its contribution to the common humanitarian effort.

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

The PRESIDENT: May I call the attention of the Assembly to the President's announcement made at the beginning of the meeting that, from now on, once the list of speakers is closed, no further names will be inscribed unless justified by special circumstances. The President beseeched members to cooperate and help ensure that the debate is conducted as scheduled.

We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 143.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.